

**Drac's back, and this time he's a lot more sexy as well**

# A MONSTER

DRACULA'S back — but don't expect a classic horror movie when you sit down to watch Francis Ford Coppola's latest masterpiece.

"I don't like vulgar slasher pictures — I like my movies to be poetic," Coppola tells TV WEEK on the eve of the long-awaited U.S. release of the \$45 million epic Bram Stoker's Dracula.

"This is not Friday The 13th — it is a combination of horror and a love story. Audiences are frightened, but it isn't just cheaply trying to make you scream. I wanted the film to be like a dark, erotic dream and have a world of its own."

And, according to early rave reviews, Coppola — known for his epic Godfather movies and hits such as Apocalypse Now, Peggy Sue Got Married and Tucker — has achieved his aim.

The famous director admits he first discovered this Dracula, written by Jim (Hook) Hart, when actress Winona Ryder asked him to read it. The request also paid off for

Winona, who went on to land the leading role of Mina, Dracula's reincarnated bride, in the film.

"I had read the book when I was 17 and I knew many of the movies weren't like the book, but Winona gave me the script and said, 'It's the real Dracula'," says Coppola.

"Since I prided myself on being familiar with the book I wanted to know if she was right, and when I started reading it I realised it was the real thing.

"And then I thought it would be a great opportunity to have some fun and cast some young people for a change."

Dracula begins in the late 1600s when Christian warrior Prince Vlad the Impaler returns from war to find his bride has killed herself in the mistaken belief he is dead.

When the church tells him her soul is damned, he goes crazy and vows to raise the dead and work against God forever, which leads him to become the first known vampire.

Four hundred years later, the seductive Transylvanian prince discovers the reincarnation of his bride in Mina (Winona Ryder), who happens to be engaged to marry ambitious banker Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves).

When Harker fails to return from his business trip to Transylvania, the lovesick vampire makes a tortured journey to London to try to win back his true love and meet his nemesis in Dutch doctor Abraham Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins).

Winona tells TV WEEK: "I'm not a vampire freak, so that wasn't what attracted me to this film. I was really taken with the love story. It's a real adult fairytale."

To play the blood-sucking villain, Coppola chose English actor Gary Oldman, who had just played Lee Harvey Oswald in Oliver Stone's JFK, and previously played punk rocker Sid Vicious in the drama Sid And Nancy.

"It's hard to research a character who's been dead for 400 years," Oldman says with a laugh.

"But the script was so good I just

- One of Dracula's victims, played by Sadie Frost, and (right) Francis Ford Coppola.



**“The audience said there was too much blood and gore, which was a totally correct assessment”**

put on the fangs and cloak and found him as I went along. This is the first time you get a sense of Dracula as a time traveller."

This is also the most erotic Dracula portrayed on screen, as the various incarnations of the monster — from bat to wolf to old man to young man — testify to their need for female blood as well as sex.

Coppola says with a chuckle: "One of the big complaints of women I've met is that in all the vampire pictures he's really a sexy, cool guy and then they never do it! So we've tried a little bit to change that."

When Coppola began screening an early cut of the film for test



as scary...

# HIT!

## SNEAK PREVIEW



audiences, rumors began circulating that it was too gory.

"The audience liked it, but said it was a little hard to understand and there was too much blood and gore, which was a totally correct assessment," he says.

"Unfortunately, someone wrote about it and every time someone else wrote about Dracula, they kept repeating the story that it was too gory. There really wasn't much more blood than we end up with,

● Dracula (Gary Oldman) with his love (Winona Ryder) and, right, as another Dracula incarnation, drinking a chalice of blood.

but nobody wants to believe that." Not that Coppola is entirely disappointed, as he adds with a resigned shrug: "I've never made a film that didn't have some controversy. When the Godfather came out, the critics said, 'How can this be a mobster movie when they're just a bunch of Italians who stay home and drink wine?'"

"They all hated Peggy Sue Got Married (which won an Oscar nomination for its star, Kathleen Turner).

"My films are not like the formulas everybody is used to. I try and come up with new formulas so you'll truly get to see something you've never seen before."

As TV WEEK's exclusive sneak preview shows, audiences will see something different when the film opens in Australia next March.

*From Jenny Cooney  
in Los Angeles*

